

# *The Baylor University and Waco Independent School District: A Twenty-five Year Partnership That Began With a Plan in a Van*

Krystal Goree, Director of Professional Practice, Baylor University  
Yolanda Williams, Assistant Superintendent, Waco Independent School District  
Suzanne Hamilton, Director of Special Education, Waco Independent School District  
Amy Mathews-Perez, Principal, Waco Independent School District  
Sandra Talbert, Clinical Faculty, Baylor University  
Rick Strot, Senior Lecturer, Baylor University  
Sara Barrett, University Liaison, Baylor University  
Darlene Bolting, University Liaison, Baylor PDS  
Sue Miller, PDS Site Coordinator, Waco Independent School District  
Dora Almaguer, PDS Site Coordinator, Waco Independent School District  
David Gilbreath, PDS Site Coordinator, Waco Independent School District  
Donna Martinez, PDS Site Coordinator, Waco Independent School District  
Sue Miller, PDS Site Coordinator, Waco Independent School District  
Belinda Rubio, PDS Site Coordinator, Waco Independent School District  
Victoria Ward, PDS Site Coordinator, Waco Independent School District  
Ricky Edison, Principal, Waco Independent School District  
Marsha Henry, Principal, Waco Independent School District  
Rebecca Mechell, Principal, Waco Independent School District  
Melissa Pritchard, Principal, Waco Independent School District  
Kaitlin Welsh, Graduate Student, Baylor University

**ABSTRACT:** The PDS partnership between Baylor University and Waco Independent School District commenced in 1993 in the context of a national conversation about innovations for improving teacher preparation and practice. During its 25-year history, the partnership has garnered national recognition, with Hillcrest PDS serving as one of 18 representative PDS partnerships to pilot the NCATE PDS standards project in 1995, its governance structure being shared as an exemplary model in the NCATE Blue Ribbon Report (NCATE, 2010), and most recently, recognized by NAPDS as one of three recipients of the 2018 Award for Exemplary Professional Development Achievement. The Baylor University and Waco Independent School District partnership continues to focus on the *NAPDS Nine Essentials* as it works diligently to address its core functions of student learning, pre-service teacher education, professional development, and research for the improvement of educational practice.

*NAPDS Essentials addressed:* 1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; 2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community; 3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need; 4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; 5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; 6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved; 7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration; 8. Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and 9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.

The Baylor/Waco ISD PDS Partnership has a rich legacy, celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year. The “plan in the van” began in 1992 as a group of Waco ISD and Baylor educators returned from a Holmes Group conference in Dallas, Texas which generated excitement about a new concept in teacher education - the professional development school. By the end of the one and half hour trip back to Waco, Texas, a plan to establish a PDS partnership was born. The following year, the Baylor/Waco ISD PDS partnership journey began with the opening of the first PDS school of the long-standing partnership - Hillcrest PDS, an elementary magnet school that proudly opened its doors in the fall of 1993. To this day, the partnership has remained true to its original mission of ‘improving teacher quality at all levels’ and its core functions of a) student learning, b) pre-service teacher education, c) professional development, and d) research for the improvement of educational practice.

## Partnership History

Students identified to attend the first PDS in the Baylor/Waco ISD partnership were selected from a district-wide application pool. Every effort was made to ensure that the demographics of the district were replicated in the student population at Hillcrest PDS. During the inaugural year of Hillcrest PDS, select teacher education students from the Baylor School of Education engaged in a full year of student teaching experience as senior level candidates (interns) at the campus. Innovations that were part of Hillcrest PDS included open classrooms, multi-age classrooms, outdoor learning environments, year-round school, and a designated PDS classroom in which Baylor students, a site coordinator, a university liaison, and other faculty met and collaborated about their learning and the achievement of students at the new PDS throughout the year.

Between 1995 and 2001, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) worked with hundreds of practitioners and teacher educators to design and field test standards for professional development schools. Based on comprehensive input and feedback from experts in the field of education, standards were developed and field-tested for three years by 18 representative PDS partnerships. Hillcrest PDS was one of the campuses selected as a pilot for the standards field-test project.

The partnership has continued to evolve and impact the students and teachers in Waco ISD as well as the faculty and teacher candidates of Baylor University. Over the course of 25 years, the partnership has expanded and now includes six fully-staffed PDS campuses and three partner campuses in Waco ISD that span all grade levels; two high schools, two middle schools, and five elementary schools.

The PDS and partner sites provide a variety of multicultural experiences for Baylor preservice teachers throughout their undergraduate experiences. Beginning the freshman year, the candidates’ introduction to teaching practicum includes working one-on-one and with small groups of students in

multiple content areas at PDS and partner campuses in Waco ISD. During field placements as teaching associates (TAs - junior-level teacher education candidates) and clinical placements as interns (senior-level student teachers), candidates work extensively in Waco ISD schools as they experience a variety of campus cultures and become integral parts of learning communities that include students from various backgrounds, cultures, and socioeconomic groups. Waco ISD consists of 26 campuses that serve approximately 15,000 students; 60% Hispanic, 29% African American, 9% White, and 2% other. The district student population is further identified as 87.5% economically disadvantaged, 18.8% English Language Learners, and 71% of the students are classified as at-risk. For many Baylor candidates, teaching experiences in Waco ISD provide them with extended student interactions in settings that are very different from their own schooling and cultural experiences, offering them unique opportunities to learn how to effectively impact student achievement in urban public schools.

## Sharing the Responsibilities at Each PDS Site

In the Baylor/Waco ISD partnership, candidate development is a shared responsibility of all PDS faculty and staff. To establish, implement, and oversee the day-to-day elements of the partnership, each PDS campus has a triad leadership team that includes a university liaison, a Waco ISD campus principal, and a site coordinator. This threesome meets on a regular basis, monitoring progress towards goals and the meeting of standards, ensuring effective communication, and assessing performance of all at the PDS site. In addition to the campus leadership, there are additional roles in the partnership that are essential for the success of each PDS campus and for the partnership in general as described in in Table 1.

## Allocating the Responsibilities in the Partnership

As with every successful partnership, Baylor University and Waco ISD have set goals, completed ongoing needs assessments, and formed an organizational structure that includes an intricate governance structure to ensure that the partnership’s vision and mission are met and maintained. These designated groups involve a variety of stakeholders in Waco ISD, Baylor University, and the Waco community. The Baylor/Waco ISD PDS Partnership has been recognized for its outstanding governance structure in the *NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel on Clinical Preparation and Partnerships for Improved Student Learning* (NCATE, 2010), a report that Art Duncan, former U.S. Secretary of Education, referred to saying, “The report of NCATE’s Blue Ribbon Panel marks the most sweeping recommendations for reforming the accreditation of teacher preparation programs in the more than century-long history of our nation’s education schools” (U.S. DOE, 2010, p. 1).

Table 1. PDS Roles and Responsibilities

PDS Campus Principal	The instructional leader of a PDS campus who upholds the goals and policies of both Waco ISD and Baylor University and, in collaboration with the university liaison and site coordinator, facilitates communication between the Baylor and Waco ISD.
Clinical Instructor	The teacher at a PDS campus qualified and identified to work in conjunction with resident faculty members to implement clinical preparation of junior-level teaching associates (TAs) to fulfill requirements of field-based university courses and rules of the state.
Mentor Teacher	The classroom teacher in a PDS or partner school who is qualified to mentor senior-level interns in assuming roles and responsibilities of a practicing teacher, demonstrating attainment of state and professional standards and program competencies, completing state and program requirements, and being recommended by the campus principal.
Resident Faculty	A university-based faculty member who teaches field-based courses and supervises course-related field experiences at PDS campuses.
University Liaison	A university-based representative with primary responsibility for facilitating communication and interaction between the university and a particular partnership campus.
Site Coordinator	A school-based partnership representative who holds broad responsibility for preservice teachers as well as helps to facilitate partnership scheduling and other operations at a particular PDS campus.
District Liaison	A Waco ISD district leader who monitors initiatives, activities, and performance in the partnership and serves as the official partnership liaison.
Director of Professional Practice	A Baylor faculty member who supports the work of all PDS and partner campuses, fosters the development of new partnerships and PDS initiatives, and serves as the official university partnership liaison.
Intern	A senior-level preservice teacher who participates in a full-year clinical experience on at least one campus and co-teaches with assigned mentor teacher(s) to gain the expertise to be an outstanding educator.
Teaching Associate (TA)	A junior-level preservice teacher who works with an assigned CI for at least two hours each day to provide instruction to small and whole groups of students as he or she plans and implements instruction with support from the CI, UL, and Site Coordinator at a PDS campus.
Novice teacher education student	A freshman- or sophomore-level preservice teacher who participates in field experiences at PDS and/or partner campuses with the guidance and support of public school faculty, Baylor faculty, Site Coordinators, and University Liaisons, practicing the implementation of best practice strategies one-on-one or with small groups of students to acquire entry-level skills to becoming a competent educator.

Note. Adapted from Table 1 included in McCall, M., Howell, L., Rogers, R., Osborne, L., Goree, K., Merritt, B., Cox, H., Fischer, J., Gardner, P., & Gassaway, J. (2017). Baylor and Midway Independent School District: An exemplary partnership. *School-University Partnerships*, 10(2), 9. and definitions of roles and responsibilities as outlined in Baylor/Waco ISD Partnership MOUs.

## Working Together Through Specific Governance

In the NCATE Blue Ribbon report (2010), the Baylor/Waco ISD Partnership governance is recognized with the statement, “Baylor University has worked closely with the Waco Independent School District to establish a partnership program that provides an intensive clinical experience for prospective teachers in an urban setting. The partnership has a highly developed governance structure, which includes a jointly managed coordinating council responsible for practical planning and implementation of the partnership and an oversight council which is responsible for providing broad policy and operational leadership for the partnership. The shared funding strategy requires that the university and the school district provide equal financial and human resource support... “ (NCATE, p. 14).

As noted in the above-mentioned document, the Baylor/Waco ISD PDS Partnership continues to be managed and coordinated through a jointly operated Oversight Council, a jointly operated Coordinating Council, and PDS Campus

Steering Committees that are unique to each campus. The work of these three groups is integrated through the overlap of membership by individuals who serve as members of more than one group. A diagram of the partnership’s organizational structure is included as Figure 1.

*The Oversight Council.* The Baylor/Waco ISD Oversight Council consists of Waco ISD senior level administrators, one who serves as the district PDS liaison, and Baylor deans, department chairs, and the partnership liaison from the Baylor School of Education. The Council meets twice each semester to address matters related to the partnership’s purpose, communication, policy, and general operations, providing direction for the partnership and ensuring consistency within and among legal constraints and organizational cultures of both partners.

*The Coordinating Council.* The Coordinating Council is co-chaired by the partnership liaisons for both Baylor and Waco ISD, and includes PDS principals, university liaisons, and site coordinators. This group meets twice each semester addressing responsibilities such as planning and implementing campus-

based practicum aspects of the partnership including recommending and planning professional development activities, establishing evidence-based policies and implementation procedures for PDS campuses consistent with partnership policies, facilitating communication among relevant constituents, and providing information to and seeking input from the PDS Oversight Council.

*PDS Campus Steering Committees.* The PDS Campus Steering Committees are comprised of the campus university liaison, the site coordinator, campus teachers, and administrators. The duties and obligations of the PDS Campus Steering Committee are numerous and include establishing and monitoring progress of PDS campus goals; providing feedback to the Oversight Council and Coordinating Council regarding campus and district initiatives; ensuring that PDS goals are addressed and monitored in Campus Improvement Plans (CIPs); identifying professional development needs specific to the PDS partnership; conducting needs assessments to help determine allocation of monetary resources, and communicating needs to the district and university liaisons; and, working with district and university faculty to assess the impact of the program on candidate growth and student achievement.

The active involvement of every stakeholder is essential to the partnership. There are numerous and varied opportunities for open communication between Waco ISD and Baylor University, implemented in a conscious effort to ensure that partners are continually monitoring and assessing progress and maintaining a consistent focus on roles and goals.

## Modeling Shared Commitment, Funding, Expertise, and Research

When the PDS Partnership expanded from one elementary campus to multiple campuses at all grade levels, an updated financial model was agreed upon between Baylor and Waco ISD. The model, which focuses on cost sharing and is still used today, was chosen for two reasons; both partners have ownership in the initiative and both partners benefit from establishing additional PDS sites. Based on the Baylor/Waco ISD financial model, the following expenses are split equally: (a) the salary of the site coordinator at each PDS site, (b) stipends to be paid to mentor teachers and clinical instructors for their work with the teacher education candidates, (c) costs for professional development of school faculty, Baylor faculty, and Baylor teacher education candidates, and (d) materials and supplies that increase as a result of the teacher education candidates being on the campuses.

In addition to financial agreement, the partnership works together in providing guidance and support through expertise of faculty from both the university and district. Content specialists representing Baylor and Waco ISD contribute to candidate, teacher, and school development by providing support, modeling best practices, and working with both school faculty and candidates to enhance learning experiences for all members of the PDS community. Specialists from both Baylor and Waco ISD meet regularly to discuss curriculum, plan and conduct

research, share research findings, and plan professional development for school staff, Baylor faculty, and candidates.

## Collaborating through Formal Articulation of the Partnership

Baylor's educator preparation program involves extensive field experiences in which university and school faculty members continually collaborate. For this reason, a clear and concise contractual agreement between the PDS partnership is critical. Although informal collaboration among PDS personnel takes place daily, a formal organizational agreement is also in place to ensure that the mission, vision, and goals of the partnership are addressed with fidelity and consistency.

The Baylor University/Waco ISD PDS Partnership enters into an articulation agreement each year through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), a document that has been vetted by attorneys who represent both the school district and university. The MOU includes an overview of obligations and commitments of each party, the partnership's mission, a clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of PDS personnel at both Baylor and Waco ISD, and a projected cost share analysis that outlines partnership expenditures. The MOU is reviewed annually and updated as needed to be in alignment with PDS goals and policy.

The collaboration between Waco ISD and Baylor University includes much more than simply investing time and funds collaboratively. Both entities are vested in the sustainable success of the partnership as is evidenced through the collective allocation of space, personnel, materials, training, and program evaluation. PDS partners utilize their resources in order to achieve the goals of the program which includes blending, reallocating, restructuring, and integrating funds, time, personnel, expertise, and knowledge.

## Engaging in Professional Development

The Baylor/Waco ISD partnership consistently embraces a proactive and innovative role intended to improve the profession of teaching through participation in the PDS model and a shared commitment to professional development that includes initiatives designed to improve teaching practices and develop mentoring capabilities. With a focus on improving the educational profession, Baylor and Waco ISD collaborate to provide opportunities to all members of the partnership to hone their professional skills and add current, research-based skills and strategies to their professional toolboxes. Through these professional development offerings, candidates and faculty from both institutions work to bridge the gap between research and practice. Table 2, though not inclusive, highlights professional development opportunities that support curriculum alignment, quality teaching at all levels, and benefits to both partners.

The Baylor/Waco ISD Partnership strives to continually provide multiple, varied professional development opportunities for Baylor TAs and interns as well as for the Waco ISD faculty who work with Baylor preservice teachers. The collaborative

Table 2. Professional Development

Co-Teaching	Professional development that utilizes the St. Cloud State University Co-Teaching model and is presented to both interns and mentor teachers each semester. This research-based model of collaborative teaching provides a comprehensive and rigorous experience for teacher candidates while allowing mentor teachers to remain actively engaged in their classroom instruction and use flexible grouping to address the academic as well as social and emotional needs of their students in ways that are not possible with just one teacher.
Action Research	Training required of every intern and mentor teacher, equipping them to identify a “wondering” and engage in experiences that use research to guide practice. Each spring, interns present the findings of their research at a program-wide Action Research Symposium poster presentation, a capstone experience of the intern year.
PDS Mentor Teacher Training	Required training for all educators who mentor intern candidates during their full-year clinical teaching experience. Training includes a framework provided by the State of Texas that consists of performance standards and developmental continuum designed to promote effective professional practice. The training provides a structure for reflection and serves as a useful tool to support coaching and mentoring.
Professional Learning Communities (PLC)	Settings that offer opportunities for ongoing collaboration in which candidates, WISD teachers, instructional specialists, and campus administrators gather to plan instruction using state standards, disaggregate and analyze data, use data to guide instruction, problem solve instructional or classroom management challenges, explore various instructional strategies, and delve into various methods of assessment.
University Sponsored Professional Development	Content-specific professional development available to all WISD and Baylor faculty. While professionals receive additional tools and educational resources at these offerings, the sessions also serve to expand educational networking. The Distinguished Lecture Series offered by Baylor School of Education opens the door for teachers to have further dialogue with experts in their field.
Campus Staff Development	Professional development sessions presented to small groups or entire campus faculties and are intended to improve both instruction and student performance through the sharing of ideas, strategies, and research findings.

nature of the unique partnership provides avenues for professional growth throughout the entire learning community. Offerings range from trainings with broad, over-arching themes that positively impact student learning to specific trainings that focus on providing solutions to unique classroom challenges. The result of this collaborative professional development is ongoing growth for educational professionals at all levels. Interns and TAs participate in all professional development that their mentor teachers or CIs attend.

### Sustaining While Evolving and Improving

Since the Baylor/Waco ISD PDS partnership celebrated its silver anniversary last year, a great deal of reflecting has taken place. Reaching such a milestone has not been an easy or simple task. In addition to the ebb and flow of public education policy, funding, and state rules and regulations, both Waco ISD and Baylor University leadership and faculty have changed. Many of those who devised “the plan in the van” in 1992 - those who had the original PDS dream and were committed to making the dream come true - have moved on. However, because of pervasive efforts, flexibility, and commitment to the professional development school model, the Baylor/Waco ISD partnership is proud that it has continued to evolve to meet the needs of Waco ISD, Baylor University, the community, and beyond. Strides made to expand the number of PDS campuses in Waco ISD have exponentially increased and improved the impact of the PDS program on

faculty from both entities, Baylor students, Waco ISD students, and their families.

Evidence of the fulfillment of the intention and goals of the partnership includes not only recognition for hard work and success, but also having PDS graduates become active, contributing members of the fabric of public education - many in Waco ISD. Waco ISD is committed to hiring teachers who complete their education degree through Baylor because these teacher education graduates know, understand, and have experience implementing rigorous content. In addition, they have already invested a great deal of time in the campuses and community, helping to make the transition into teaching at a Waco ISD campus fluid.

### Reflecting and Looking Toward the Future

The Baylor-Waco ISD PDS partnership broke ground with the first Professional Development School in Waco, Texas more than 25 years ago. Developing professional educators through innovative and research-based practices, whether pre-service teachers, new teachers, or seasoned teachers, has been and remains a commitment of the partnership. The Baylor University/Waco ISD PDS partnership is a model of exemplary practices and commendable collaboration that facilitates the implementation of the *NAPDS Nine Essentials*. The investment in our local community, our educational community, and our partnership has set a standard of professionalism and high expectations that

continues to permeate public education on numerous fronts that reach beyond our classrooms, campuses, and city. This long-standing partnership anticipates that the next 25 years will bring even more positive learning opportunities, unique innovations, and inclusive experiences to all faculty, staff, teacher education candidates, and students in every classroom as well as having a positive impact on education in the district, community, state, nation, and world. <sup>SUP</sup>

## Appendix A

Baylor University School of Education (SOE) and Waco Independent School District (WISD) Professional Development School Partnership Overarching Organizational Chart

## References

McCall, M., Howell, L., Rogers, R., Osborne, L., Goree, K., Merritt, B., Cox, H., Fischer, J., Gardner, P., & Gassaway, J. (2017). Baylor and Midway Independent School District: An exemplary partnership. *School-University Partnerships, 10*(2), 9.

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2010, November). *Transforming teacher education through clinical practice: A national strategy to prepare effective teachers*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.ncate.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=zzeiB1OoqPk%3D&tabid=715>

U.S. Department of Education. (2010, November). *Secretary Arne Duncan's remarks to National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-national-council-accreditation-teacher-education>

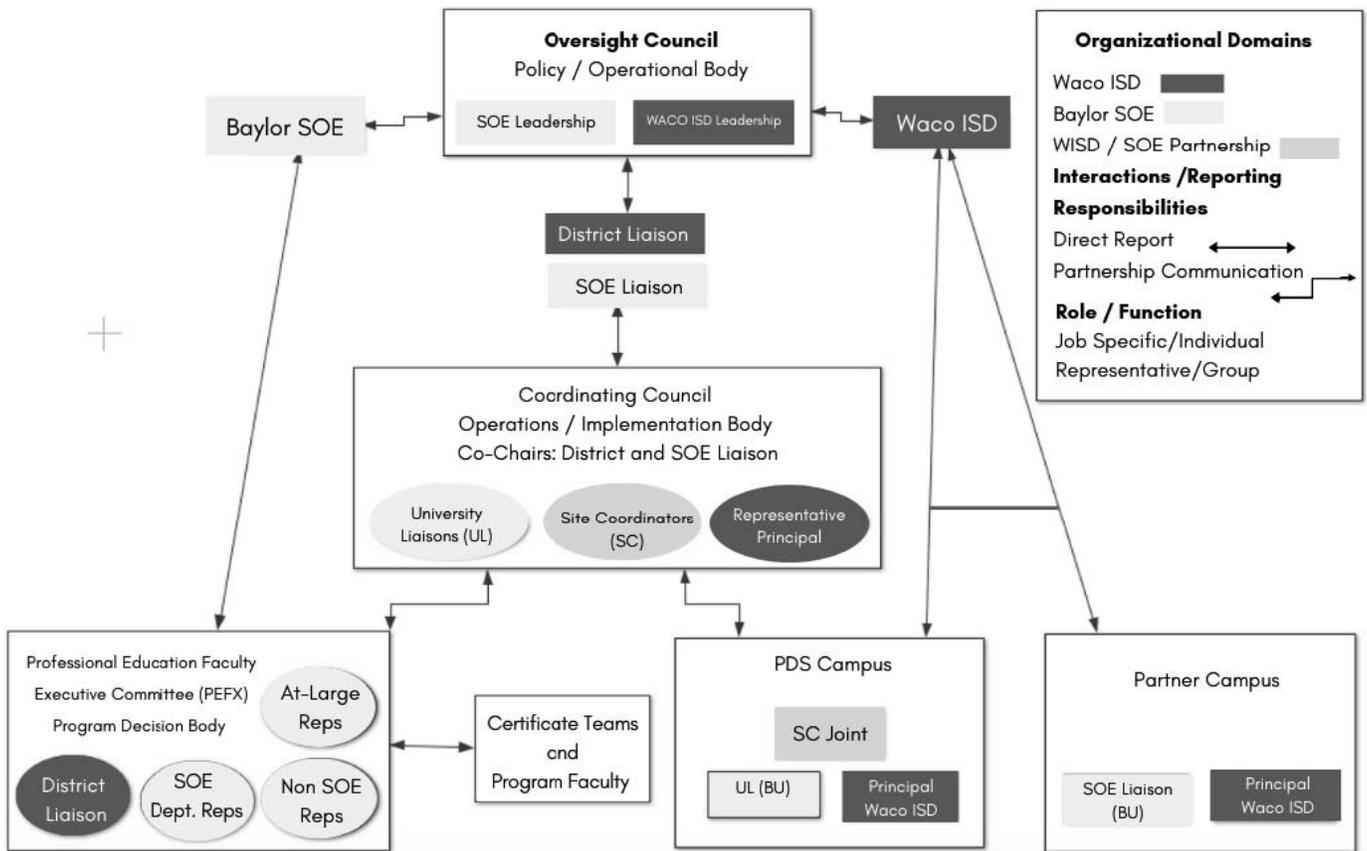


Figure 1. The Partnership's Organizational Structure